

A Special Issue on Central Valley Raptor Ecology

I am especially gratified as President of the club to introduce this collection of papers stemming from the winter raptor surveys. This project was a brainchild of Zach Smith who sought to replicate similar surveys that had been conducted in Oregon. With Ed Pandolfino on board to help raise funds, organize volunteers, analyze data, and write the reports, Zach's vision was quickly realized. From 2007 to 2010, a dedicated team of birders, nearly all of whom are club members, scoured the countryside to count wintering raptors and characterize their habitats.

The results, included here, and in two papers published elsewhere (Pandolfino et al., *Western Birds* 42:62-84, 2011; Pandolfino et al., *Journal of Raptor Research* 45:38-45, 2011), are astonishing and a true testament to the power of high quality citizen science. The project is a model for what the Central Valley Bird Club aspires to promote. Without paid staff, our club is bound by the limitations of volunteerism. Fortunately, we have many talented club members that provide a great potential for future projects. I invite ideas for future projects and especially your willingness to provide your time and skills to realizing this potential.

As you will read in the following papers, this project is not just an excellent example of what citizen science can accomplish. It also fulfills a critical need for demonstrating the importance of the Central Valley, and especially grassland habitats, to wintering raptors, as well as for documenting key aspects of raptor ecology. Many of the General Plans of the various counties within the Central Valley have marked open rangelands for future development and fragmentation. This project was born out of a dire need to showcase these lands as nationally important for wintering raptors. To this end, the project has succeeded in laying out solid data and conclusions to support grassland conservation for raptors, which of course will also provide many other biological, ecosystem, and public benefits.

John Sterling